

## yesterFriday by nbfutureboy

**Category:** Stranger Things (TV 2016)

**Genre:** Coming Out, First Kiss, Groundhog Day AU, M/M, Mutual Pining, Psychological Horror, Time Loop, background Lucas Sinclair/Max Mayfield

**Language:** English

**Characters:** Dustin Henderson, Jonathan Byers, Joyce Byers, Lucas Sinclair, Maxine "Max" Mayfield, Mike Wheeler, Will Byers

**Relationships:** Will Byers/Mike Wheeler

**Status:** Completed

**Published:** 2018-04-07

**Updated:** 2018-04-24

**Packaged:** 2022-04-22 04:41:24

**Rating:** Teen And Up Audiences

**Warnings:** No Archive Warnings Apply

**Chapters:** 6

**Words:** 19,284

**Publisher:** archiveofourown.org

**Summary:**

Will Byers wakes up as usual one Friday morning - he worries about his family, his History test, and telling the people he loves that he doesn't Like Girls in that way.

Then he does it again.

[Groundhog Day AU where Will gets stuck in a time loop.]

# 1. Chapter 1

## Author's Note:

(This is entirely inspired by how the ST track 'Lay-Z-Boy' sounds like 'Heat of the Moment' by Asia.)

Will blinks himself into the world of the waking and weary, and immediately tries to turn over. From within his cover cocoon, he can pretend for just a minute that he doesn't have to get up for school.

"*Will!*" Jonathan calls, over distant sizzling. "Rise and shiiiiiiiine!"

He lets out a big *urrrrrghghghhh*, and drags himself out of the warm confines of his bed.

It's been hard, recently. With every passing day, it's becoming more and more obvious that his complete disinterest in girls and his complete devotion to Mike Wheeler may be connected somewhat. This is frightening in itself, but he knows he's going to have to tell someone at some point before he bursts with the pressure, and practicing how he'll phrase it - who he'll tell first - how to react to how *they* react - well, it's a little bit stressful.

Jonathan shoots him a strange look from over the breakfast table: "you okay, buddy?"

And that's when Will realizes he's been breathing rather rapidly, with a piece of French toast held halfway to his face.

"Yeah," he says, "yeah, I'm-- I'm fine."

This is enough for Jonathan, but when Joyce bustles through into the kitchen, he thinks he may not have wiped the panic from his face quickly enough. "Will, honey," she says, "good morning! Are you feeling okay? You look a little pale--"

"I'm fine, Mom," he laughs, barely fighting off her hair ruffling. "I was just thinking about the History test I have today. *Ew.*"

She titters, and starts to make her goodbyes, but Jonathan grabs her

attention.

“Mom, I was wondering, uh... Since Eric left, work’s been stuck for evening shifts, and they’re offered me one tonight from six ‘til eleven--”

Joyce takes one glance at Will and sharply fixes her eldest son with a Look. “Jonathan,” she starts, “we’ve been through this. I’m not having Will be alone in the house.”

“I could see if--”

“I’m sorry, Jonathan, but it’s a ‘no’. Don’t be late, okay, baby? I’ll see you tonight.”

Jonathan’s face falls as Joyce gives him a kiss on the cheek, gives Will a little wave, and breezes her way out of the house.

Will feels guilty all the way to school. He knows they could use the money, and there’s little chance of *Will* getting a job, so Jonathan’s their only other source of income. And it’s Will’s fault that they can’t take advantage of that.

Stupid, stupid, *stupid*.

He’s distracted by Jonathan shivering in the driver’s seat. “There’s another one of those trucks,” he says, pointing with his hands still on the wheel. Will knows what he means before it’s even brought to his attention - they’re not like the Hawkins Power and Light vans, but they emanate the same uneasy vibes. Sleek, black, and unmarked, with a beige interior, and *always* two people sitting in the cabin.

“Yikes,” Will says. “Maybe they’re still keeping a watch over us, huh?”

Jonathan shrugs. “I bet Hopper’s got it under control, whatever it is. Hell, it’s probably part of some agreement he came up with.”

That sounded like it could be plausible.

School doesn’t drag like it usually does, to his surprise. The whole day moves smoothly - Shakespeare, Biology, World Geography,

Lunch. They all sit together on their own cafeteria row these days, which is *awesome*, because none of them have really had a whole table to themselves before. It's laughably predictable, the way lunch pans out. Max will always blush when she sits next to Lucas, but her eyes will always dart around the group, as if to say, *make fun of me, I dare ya*. Dustin will always sit next to Will. Mike always sits opposite, on Lucas' other side.

Though Mike has his D&D binder open on the table, he's not really paying attention, and that is different. Will's been pretty happy to note that for the last month or so, Mike's been way less mopey, so he must finally be getting past being 'just friends' with El from their talk a month before *that*. They both agreed it was for the best, and Will really doesn't want to ask for more details than that in case he puts Mike back into a bad mood, but he can tell that it was eating at him for a little while.

Having Mike be an active part of the conversation, after weeks of him being down, is just plain nice to see.

"They're going out tonight to see some play or something," he's saying to Max, "so Nancy's staying in to babysit me and Holly. Babysit! I'm *not* a baby--"

He gestures a little too wildly and sweeps his binder off the table entirely, spewing paper all over the place from the plastic pockets. Luckily, it's contained to their little area - mostly clean - so Will crouches down to help him gather them up.

"Is this one of mine?" he asks, holding up a piece of artwork.

"Uh," says Mike, turning a little bit pink, "yeah, it is. It's got the whole party on, so I use it for reference."

Oh, yeah, Will remembers this one. It's their updated battle formation, with Max's character grinning maniacally at the enemy they're facing off, and a little space to paste in El's character, should she ever make one.

"Do you-- do you want it back?" Mike asks quickly.

Will bites his lip to hide a smile. "No, it's okay," he says, "you keep it, if it's helping the campaigns."

He hands back the stack of sheets he's collected, and the two return to their seats. Mike doesn't say anything for the next five minutes. Maybe it's because he's preoccupied with organizing his handbook in the correct order again, but he's also flushed a much deeper scarlet color now, and it weirdly suits him.

The last period of the day is his test on English and Spanish colonists of America. The clock in Will's History class is five minutes slow, he suspects - when they finally get let out, he heads to his locker to meet up with the others, and he's positive that he's flunked it.

"I'm positive that I flunked it," he whines to Dustin.

"Shut *up*, you studied for like, two solid weeks for that dumb test," Dustin retorts. "All you've been doing since it was announced it drawing up those little notecards."

And that's when it hits Will - huh, maybe he could practice what he wants to say to everyone like it was a school topic. Right? Was it possible to study for a confession?

Whilst he's mulling this over, he registers that Lucas has been complaining that he's hungry for the last minute solid. At the exact moment he snaps back into reality, Max saunters by and tosses him an apple - except Lucas is so distracted by her entrance that he completely, belatedly fumbles it.

"Wow," she wheezes, laughing so hard that she doubles over and has to lean on her skateboard. Will giggles even more when he sees even *Mike*, Voted Least Athletic By The Party Four Years Running, shooting him an unimpressed look.

"You want a bruise, too?" Lucas threatens, brandishing the apple at Mike. There's no seriousness to it.

They wait in the parking lot for Jonathan to swing by, and then split, yelling goodbyes into the afternoon. Will watches Max skate down the road from the passenger window.

“What are you up to this afternoon, buddy?”

“Studying, I think,” Will tells his brother. “Maybe some creative stuff. I don’t know.”

Jonathan nods approvingly. It's a quiet day after that. As soon as he gets in the door, Will cracks open his art supplies box, and starts sketching out Mike's character for some proper reference sheets. It might be more helpful than the material Mike currently has on hand, and he's pretty proud of the composition of some of his new doodles, if he's honest.

After Jonathan fixes him dinner, Will retreats back into his room. He spends a lot of the rest of the evening drafting coming out notes, and wondering if he were to radio Mike, would Mike come and hang out with him at this horrible hour? His mom won't be back until ten thirty, and it's nine now, so probably not.

*I think I like*

*I definitely like*

*Mom and Jonathan - I have something to tell you*

*I'm still me. I'm always going to be Will.*

Will keeps that one. It makes him feel better to look at, because it's a bigger statement than what he's trying to say.

He wonders what Mike is doing.

---

Will wakes up naturally - he's been getting better at not needing an alarm clock, now that it's lighter outside - and sits up in bed. Instead

of curling up and turning over, he takes in the morning from the safety of his room.

'Child' by Free is drifting through the wall from Jonathan's room. Will likes that album. It's calming.

He can hear his mom's hair dryer, and distant sizzling. As soon as he clocks the smell of French toast, he hears Jonathan calling out:

"Will! Rise and shiiiiiiiine!"

"French toast again, huh?" Will asks, grinning as he pads barefoot into the kitchen.

Jonathan shoots him a very strange look as he piles toast onto Will's plate. "What are you talking about? I made pancakes yesterday," he says.

Will frowns. "I thought that was the day before."

"You okay, buddy?" Jonathan says, and the tone of the question stabs Will with a frightening sense of déjà vu.

"Yeah," he says slowly, and takes a seat at the table. "Yeah, I'm fine."

This is enough for Jonathan, but when Joyce bustles through into the kitchen, he thinks he may not have wiped the panic from his face quickly enough. "Will, honey," she says, "good morning! Are you feeling okay? You look a little pale--"

"I'm fine, Mom," he laughs, barely fighting off her hair ruffling. "I just got my time a little mixed up, that's all."

She titters, and starts to make her goodbyes, but Jonathan grabs her attention.

"Mom, I was wondering, uh... Since Eric left, work's been stuck for evening shifts, and they're offered me one tonight from six 'til eleven--"

"Jonathan, we've been through this. I'm not having Will be alone in the house."

“I could see if--”

And, oh, *God*, there it was again. Will chews his mouthful of toast until it turns into mush, trying to force himself to swallow down on the sudden sick feeling that’s settled in his chest.

He’s seen this before. Seen Jonathan’s disappointment, seen his mom vanish from the house like a twister passing through, *felt* the guilt of this particular situation being his fault as they drive into school.

He thought it was Saturday today.

“There’s another one of those trucks,” Jonathan says, shivering in the driver’s seat. Will knows what he means before it’s even brought to his attention, because he’d seen this yesterday, and those unsettling vehicles have been patrolling all week.

“Maybe something happened,” Will says quietly.

Jonathan shrugs. “I bet Hopper’s got it under control, whatever it is. Hell, it’s probably part of some agreement he came up with.”

Will’s not so sure about that.

He thought it was Saturday, goddamnit. It’s *Friday*. How is it Friday?

Shakespeare, Biology, World Geography, Lunch.

The routine of their little row of seats in the cafeteria is a lot less laughable now. Max blushes and glares as she sits next to Lucas. Mike next to Lucas and opposite Will, Dustin next to Will, Mike’s D&D binder open but forgotten on the table.

Maybe it was a vision. He’s trying to rationalize it to himself. Maybe he got a glimpse of the future yesterday, or a mental run-through of the whole day - his intuition has always been pretty good, even in real life, and it would be easy to check if something bad was on the way in again.

He’d wait to see if the feeling repeated itself. Just in case it was a weird dream, or something.



But it had felt so *real*.

"They're going out tonight to see some play or something," Mike's saying to Max, "so Nancy's staying in to babysit me and Holly. Babysit! I'm *not* a baby--"

Will watches in horror as the binder is swept off the table, one gangly arm cast too far in emphasis. Paper slips across the floor from its confines. Mike curses and dives after it, and Will crouches to help gather it up again, and oh, there's his drawing.

"Reference right?" he asks, holding up the party's battle formation.

"Uh," says Mike, turning a little bit pink, "yeah, it is. It's got the whole party on, so I use it for-- uh, do you want it back?" Mike asks quickly.

He knows the flustered response is coming - and still isn't really sure *how* - but he has to bite his lip to mask his smile again. "No, it's okay," he says, "you keep it, if it's helping the campaigns."

He hands back the stack of sheets he's collected. When they sit back down, the other three have forgotten about the accident entirely and have resumed their conversations, but Mike is still strangely red and strangely quiet.

"Hey," Will says in a low voice, watching Mike slide the pages back into the appropriate pockets. "I can... draw you some proper character references, if you need them. If you want."

Mike's head jerks up with wide eyes. His hands tighten on the edge of the binder.

"That'd be awesome, Will," he breathes, "thanks so much!"

"No problem," he says. There's a little bubble of happiness that settles in him, after that, and it doesn't burst until they leave the cafeteria.

Will takes his last-period History test again. He's *still* positive that he's flunked it.

"You studied for like, two solid weeks for that dumb test," Dustin says, trying to be uplifting. "All you've been doing since it was announced it drawing up those little notecards. I'm sure you did just great. Okay?"

"Okay," he agrees reluctantly. How he could've gotten a test so wrong when it wasn't even the only time he's taken it? *Totally* beyond him.

It strikes him that he has to write up his confession-study-notecard-things again, if yesterFriday didn't actually happen. That sours his mood even more.

"How am I so hungry? I had the biggest lunch ever."

"Maybe you're in for a growth spurt," Mike suggests.

"Yeah," Dustin adds, "growing into an even bigger dork."

Lucas protests this hotly, and Will knows what's coming next:

"Cram an apple in it, Stalker," Max grins. The disturbance in the air as she brushes past Will feels just as solid as it did the first time he'd felt it.

Lucas drops the apple. Lucas gets laughed at. Lucas threatens Mike. Jonathan picks him up. It seems to Will that he must have had a really, really in depth vision, or maybe he has actually totally lost all remaining threads of his sanity. He's been picked apart at the seams by the clothes dryer of life.

"What are you up to this afternoon, buddy?" Jonathan asks. Today, it feels like he's just trying to make conversation to break the silence.

"I'm feeling kind of tired," Will says. "I might do some drawing and then go to bed after dinner. I don't know."

Jonathan nods. After that, the day is just as quiet as before.

Will opens his supplies box with more force than the first time. The lines are harder, and his heart's not really in it, even though he decided to try out Will the Wise instead of Mike's character.

Yeah, the lines are all wrong. This is a terrible reference picture.

Jonathan fixes dinner and doesn't go to work. Will retreats back into his room with only minor checkups from his brother later. Later on, Jonathan's music turns off - he's taken an early night, too.

When he's sure he's alone, and won't be disturbed, he throws the covers from his bed. Will practically leaps into his desk chair. He wonders if he can remember it all.

*I like*

*I like*

*I love*

He scribbles it out angrily. He doesn't like the certainty of it, or the simplicity; not because he wouldn't be understood, but because it's *scary*. It would be hard to take back something like that if he were wrong.

Time to return to the cocoon. Will's looking forward to a relaxing weekend, now. He briefly considers radioing Mike to ask if they could go to the Palace, but dismisses it. It's too late to disturb him.

He falls asleep fitfully. There's not dream for him to recall.

### **Notes for the Chapter:**

Songs:

Child - Free

## 2. Chapter 2

By the third day, it's gotten *weird*.

Honestly, Will's too frightened, more than anything, to do things differently. He blinks away sleep and realizes that if 'Child' by Free is playing again, muffled by the walls between his bedroom and Jonathan's, then he must be in yesterFriday again. Jonathan *never* plays the same song in the morning twice in a row.

This is more than a vision.

It must show, because Joyce asks after his complexion over French toast, Jonathan gets his shift suggestion denied again, and he's barely even unsettled by the ridiculously suspicious vans hanging around Hawkins.

"Maybe they're reporters looking for the next scoop. Weird stuff happens around here," he puts forwards this time.

Jonathan replies that Hopper probably has it under control.

Shakespeare, Biology, World Geography, Lunch.

Mike complains that he's not a baby and throws his binder off the edge of the table again. Will forgot that was going to happen because he was actually listening to what was going on this time: Max wants to earn some cash by babysitting as soon as she gets to high school, and Mike is saying why she should only babysit kids under 10. After all, Nancy's only a few years older than them, and that makes Mike's situation much more embarrassing.

Not a baby. Whoosh. Paper everywhere.

Will doesn't mention his picture. He just hands it back.

Silly, gorgeous Mike still flushes a beautiful pink. "I didn't mean to just take it," he tries to explain, "it's got the whole party on, so I've been using it for referencing--"

"Hey, it's fine," Will says, laughing. "Keep it. I'll make you some even

better ones.”

“Really?” Mike grins. His whole face lights up. “Will, that would be awesome!”

They stay there for a second: uneven piles paper, clutched in their hands. Smiling at each other brightly, crouched on the floor of the cafeteria.

Dustin chooses that moment to laugh loudly at whatever dirty joke Max might be throwing around, and Will giggles nervously.

Mike is so flustered that he hits his head on the corner of the table. The others’ laughter washes over them warmly as Mike grimaces, laughing to show that’s he’s not really that hurt.

“Oh, man,” Will says, reaching over to examine it, “are you okay?”

“Fine,” Mike says, turning predictably scarlet. He always does, for some reason.

Will brushes Mike’s fringe away from the bump on his forehead, checking the red mark that’s been left there.

“Be careful,” he murmurs, and sits back down.

Mike is is silent as he reorganizes his binder.

American colonists. Will finds he’s had a bit more time to think about his answers, now, and thinks maybe he rambled a little less than the other times he took his test.

“How do you think you did?” Dustin asks, packing his books into his locker.

“Eh,” says Will, shrugging. “I think I did okay.”

“Really? You kinda looked like you thought you’d flunked it. I got worried for a second.”

“Yeah,” Will smiles, “you were gonna say something like, *oh, Will, you studied for two weeks on those little notecards*, or something.

Right?”

Dustin looks at him sharply. “How’d you know that?”

“Magic,” snorts Will, and wiggles his fingers like he’s casting a spell.

Dustin shoves him. “Clairvoyance. You son of a bitch, Byers.”

He wishes more than anything that he could see the world through everyone else’s eyes, instead of revising his stupid confession cards and worrying about their reactions.

“If anyone’s the dork here, it’s *you*--!”

Will snaps out of his introspection just in time to catch the last of Lucas’ protests, and for Max to brush past him.

“Cram an apple in it, Stalker,” Max grins, and throws an apple at him, underhand.

Will takes one, split-second glance at his dumbfounded friend.

He catches the apple.

There’s a silence, in which everyone, *especially* Lucas, stares at his hand - and oh yeah, he caught it *one-handed*, which he’s probably never managed before in his whole damn life.

Dustin wheezes. “*Clairvoyance*,” he says, pointing an accusing finger at Will.

“An educated guess,” Will replies drily, and places the apple in Lucas’ palms, who continues to stare at it.

“Aw, did I distract you? Aw, Lucas--”

“Shut up, Max.”

As they walk out of school, bickering between themselves, Mike nudges Will’s shoulder. “That was super cool,” he grins.

“Thanks,” Will grins back. “Guess I’ve had practice defending against missile fire.”

Mike straight-up laughs at that, loudly. It echoes in the halls as they leave the building. Will's glad - not for the first time, either, but he's still not sure how to feel about that - that he's been feeling happier recently.

Max skates into the distance. Lucas and Dustin bid their goodbyes and cycle off, too. And as they're waiting in the parking lot for Jonathan to pull up, Mike shuffles closer.

"Do you wanna come over this afternoon?"

"Are you sure?" Will says, alarmed by this new development. "I don't want to give your sister someone else to babysit--"

"Oh, don't worry about that," says Mike. His eyes crinkle up as he dismisses the whole idea. "She'll probably be happy that we're not in her way, if we're in the basement."

Will beams. When Jonathan rolls around the corner, it's easy to persuade him to let Will stay for the afternoon.

"I'll be over to pick you up at seven, so be ready, okay?" Jonathan says. He hangs out of the window of his car: "either of you want a ride?"

The two share a look. Mike's got his bike.

"Is it alright if we walk?" he asks.

"Sure thing, Wheeler," says Jonathan, grinning. "Look after my brother."

"He looks after me!" Mike calls back, and Jonathan snorts, reversing out of the middle school parking lot.

Then he's gone. Mike starts pushing his handlebars as they head back towards the Wheeler house. Will notices that the ridiculous suspension springs on the front are squeaking a little.

"Gotta put some oil on that."

"Ah, I'll get my dad to do it later," he says, dismissively again. "They

have to leave at four to go to the venue and eat or whatever, so they'll probably be gone by the time we get back."

"What do you wanna do?"

"I don't know," shrugs Mike. He's still smiling, in that way he does when he feels like playing it by ear. "I was planning on developing the next campaign. I think I can get fifty hours out of this one."

"Fifty?!"

"Hey, they'd last longer than a month if Dustin didn't try to take shortcuts all the time!"

Will giggles, feeling the sound well up all the way from underneath his ribs. Mike clips the back of his own heels with his bike pedals, because he turns his head at the sound and sends a blinding smile Will's way.

"I could draw some NPCs up," Will says, "if you wanted?"

They turn onto the back end of Oak Street, cutting past the shops in town. It's deserted. "That sounds great," Mike says, "I don't wanna give you too many details because a lot of it is a surprise, but-- well, there's lots of enemies, mostly. Although a merchant I came up with last night might be interesting, I bet you'd draw her so cool."

"Oh, tell me!"

"Well--"

And they both stop. So abruptly, in fact, that the suspension on Mike's front wheel squeaks comically.

There's a man at the end of the street.

He's blocking their exit, should they try to make a run for it. Will doesn't know why that's his first instinct, but he feels more secure in his judgement the more he takes in: he's hunched over, garbed in tattered black rags which hang off him in loose ribbons. Pale, shrivelled feet have uncut toenails protruding from every digit, and from what he can see, the hands are the same.



No shoes. Shaggy, matted hair.

The fear that starts to burn through his chest is extinguished entirely when Mike grabs blindly for his hand. Will squeezes it. Mike's shaking more than he is.

"Hey," Will calls out--

*("are you sure about this?" Mike hisses--)*

"--are you okay?"

He never gets an answer. The world flickers around them.

Will's not sure what happens next. He thinks he might have been screaming, or maybe that the wind whipping around them was so harsh that it sounded like screaming, and he's not sure which is worse - at the very least, he hopes it wasn't Mike. Kind, protective Mike, who's getting taller every day, and who held his hand when the figure at the opening of Oak Street started to turn to face them.

*I think I like*

*I definitely like*

*Mike*

Will dreams fitfully that night. How did he get back in bed? It felt like an age, but it must have been a split-second. He's trapped in the cocoon of blankets, and he can only think of streaming black rags, coiling like tendrils around him and his best friend. His head is filled with images of not-quite faces and clawed hands. Mike's face, when it appears, contorts with anguish and age - if Will wasn't screaming before, he definitely is *now* - and he can't stop it, can't stop time from draining the life from them both--

---

“*Will!* Rise and shiiiiiiiine!”

Will sits bolt-upright, and wipes sticky sweat from his forehead.

A dream. Just a dream.

*But what about the other yesterFridays?*, a little voice in the back of his head says.

He ignores it, and jumps out of bed. Say it actually happened, whatever it was that happened yesterday afternoon - *this* afternoon, whatever - wouldn't logic say that it would all be back to normal, now? Mike would be the going-on-fourteen-year-old he was desperate to be, with limbs he wasn't used to yet, and a smile he'd gotten too used to not using.

Man, Will is getting pretty tired of French toast.

Jonathan shoots him a strange look from over the breakfast table: “you okay, buddy?”

“Yeah,” Will says, chewing absently. “Just think about how to tell you and Mom that I'm gay.”

Everything screeches to a halt.

“What?” says Jonathan.

“What?” says Will, very quickly.

He'd honestly just been thinking about Mike. Will's never said the word out loud, not even to himself. Never thought it, or written it down on a notecard, or *anything*.

“Will, honey, good *morning!* Are you feeling okay? You look a little pale--”

“I'm fine, Mom,” he says. He doesn't laugh.

“Just finishing up breakfast,” Jonathan mumbles, and flicks egg

scrapings from the bottom of the pan onto Will's plate.

"Well, have a good day at school, you two - and don't forget, I've got an evening shift, so I won't be back 'til ten thirty. I love you!"

"Love you too," the boys chorus.

Joyce leaves. Will throws down his toast and rushes to pull his clothes on.

They climb into the car silently; Jonathan turns his music completely off, when it flares up as the car rumbles into life.

"I'm sorry," Will murmurs.

Jonathan looks at him like he really is crazy. "What the hell *for*, Will?!"

"You were gonna ask Mom about taking the shift that's going tonight. The six 'til eleven one." He stops playing with his hands, and pulls on his seatbelt: "she would've said no, if that's any consolation."

"That's not wh-- wait, how did you know that?"

"I just did. Oh, and the... the thing, too, I guess."

"Will," Jonathan says seriously. "I don't care that you're g-- *well*, that's not true, because I *do* care. I care about you. You're my little brother, and one day you're gonna date a guy who loves you as much as you love *literally* everyone and everything else. You got it?"

"I got it," Will whispers at his hands.

"Look at me."

Jonathan fixes him with such a stern, powerful look, that Will is briefly reminded of his mother.

"It's fine. Seriously. I reacted how I did because it was a bit of a shock to hear it over breakfast, but that doesn't mean it was a bad shock. Just new."

He starts the car, full of fierce determination, and flicks on the radio.

Will's so lucky.

It's typical Jonathan music: *gonna break out of the city, leave the people here behind.*

Will loves this song.

"There's another one of those trucks."

Pressing his forehead against the misty window, Will tries to take in the van this time. It was still sleek, black, and unmarked. It still had a beige interior. The two people sitting in the cabin didn't seem to find Jonathan's car of any note: the passenger was a man in his forties, maybe, with a weathered face and a thick moustache. The driver was younger. Maybe mid-twenties. Fresh-faced and mean-looking.

Jonathan shivers.

"What do you think they're doing?" Will asks.

"I don't know," Jonathan says simply.

Shakespeare, Biology, World Geography, Lunch. Mike sweeps his ring binder onto the floor. Max cracks jokes that would make a sailor blush. History test. The clock is five minutes slow.

He's definitely flunked it, this time. He spent most of the period trying not to think about that awful image of Mike's face - he'd looked like he was in so much *pain*.

What had the man at the end of Oak Street even looked like?

How had he gotten home?

"I've definitely flunked it, this time," he mutters, as Dustin packs his books into his locker.

"Whaddaya mean, 'this time'?"

"Nothing," Will says.

Mike joins them, congregating around Dustin's locker whilst Lucas puts his own things away. As he's complaining about his never-ending hunger, Will takes in Mike's face - still young, still freckled, and still very, very handsome.

The thought of the day resetting, after the panic he'd put himself into this morning over French toast, is enough to draw a sigh out of him.

"No, *don't* 'cram an apple in it', Stalker," he finds himself saying, holding the apple down in Max's hands so that she can't throw it. He throws a hand at Lucas' expression in a very Mike-esque way. "Look at him! He takes forever to start up whenever you walk past him already. He's not gonna be able to catch whatever it is you throw at him."

For the second time that day, everything screeches to a halt.

"Are you okay, Will?" Lucas asks.

He lets go of Max. "...Yeah. Sorry," he says. "That was rude of me. I don't think I did very well on my test. Not that that's an excuse--"

"Hey. It's cool, Byers," Max grins. It's always been easy for her to forgive Will, and he feels a surge of gratitude towards her. "I mean... You *are* right."

"Max!"

"It's *true*, Lucas, come *on*. You're like a crappy computer. It's very cute."

"It is?" Lucas asks, and that's when the other three decide that they need to head home.

They watch Dustin cycle away, yelling goodbyes against the breeze, and wait for Jonathan. And wait. And wait. It actually gets to the point where Lucas and Max cycle and skate past them respectively, also yelling their goodbyes.

"Are you sure you're okay, Will?" Mike asks.

Will feels a bit sick. "Something's not right," he says.

Mike's full attention is immediate. "Are you sure? What's the matter?"

"He's late. He's never late."

That gets a frown: "your brother's late a *lot*, Will."

It still doesn't sit right with him. Not in the slightest. "Not today," Will whispers.

The frown deepens.

Across the way, they can see the high school - most of the students have already left, but there are a few stragglers and loiterers hanging around outside.

"Look," Will starts, "why don't you go home? I can wait by myself, it's okay. You've got that campaign you wanted to work out--"

"How'd you know that?" Mike asks, bewildered. "I mean-- no, no way, I'm staying here."

"Seriously, Mike, I'll be fine. You will too, if you avoid Oak Street."

As soon as the words leave his mouth, he regrets ever having said them. But by some miracle - or some terrible, terrible stroke of luck - Mike doesn't notice.

"What the hell is that?" he says quietly. He's staring at the high school, and his hand shoots out to touch Will's upper arm.

If Will squints, he can make out three people sprinting across the high school yard. They're being pursued by two adults in blue overalls. And if he squints even *further* into the distance, he can see the traffic parting, all the way down Mulberry Street.

"Is that Steve with them?" Mike asks, still narrowing his eyes against the afternoon sun, and that's when Will realizes - it's his brother, and Mike's sister, and Steve Harrington, all tripping over themselves to get to them as fast as possible.

They're yelling.

*“Will!”* Jonathan roars.

From out of the traffic emerge three black vans, like the ones Will’s been seeing all week.

“Run,” says Mike, all the color draining from his face in an instant - *“run!”*

They turn on their heels, Mike tugging on Will’s jacket, and Will grappling at Mike’s sweater, but it’s too late - a black van screeches to a halt in front of them, cutting off their exit, and the men from earlier get out.

Will’s paralysed.

“What do you want?!” Mike screeches.

But they advance. Blue overalls. One in his twenties, one in his forties. Youthful and weathered.

A whole arm is thrown against his chest, as Mike moves protectively in front of him: “you can’t have him,” he’s saying, “you hear me?! *You can’t have him--*”

“Well,” says the youthful man. “It’s a good job we want *you*.”

And it all kicks off. Will jerks out of his frozen state, fisting hands in Mike’s sweater and pulling him backwards. Behind him, he hears Nancy screaming - one of the other workers has tackled Steve to the ground, and they both audibly grind against the asphalt.

“It’s him,” the older worker says, “*he’s* the epicenter of this all--”

They pry Mike and Will apart. Both of them are kicking and yelling, and Will’s biting where he can, but more vans have pulled up and that means more workers. There must be twenty of the blue-overalls now. Steve’s unconscious; Jonathan’s spitting blood into the gravel and screeching, his hands held behind his back. He’s pretty sure Nancy just punched a man *very* cleanly in the face, and he’s pretty sure she’s gonna do it again if they don’t manage to stop her.

“Mike,” he groans, reaching an arm out--

*I think*

“Mike! *Mike--*”

*I definitely*

He thrashes against the vice-like grip of the workers, looking for anyone to help. A teacher, an adult, Hopper - hell, *anyone*.

In the corner of his eye, he spots the man from Oak Street. He's in profile, against the sun.

One long, clawed finger reaches out to him.

“*Mike!* ” he screams, ripping his throat absolutely raw, and that's where the day ended.

### **Notes for the Chapter:**

Songs:

Do Anything You Wanna Do - Eddie and the Hot Rods



### 3. Chapter 3

The next morning, Will isn't sure how he got into bed again.

He turns over, ignoring Free drifting over from the other room, and totally blanking Jonathan when he's called for breakfast. He can't do it. Not again. That non-face man is going to jab a claw into his life again, and another Friday is going to *seriously* mess him up. Probably for good.

He lets out a big *urrrrrghghghh*.

There's a knock at the door, and his heart leaps into his mouth, before he realizes it's just Jonathan. "Hey, Will, it's time to get up... Will?"

Will stares at him. If he looks as bad as he feels, then he hope he hasn't magically passed on illness to anyone.

Jonathan's voice is softened with concern, now. "...You okay, buddy?"

"No," croaks Will. "I feel bad. Like... Normal bad."

It briefly registers that it's already pretty messed up he has to differentiate between 'normal bad' and 'Upside Down bad', before he remembers that it could be both. And that if it is, they could be linked.

Joyce pokes her head around the door. "Will, honey," she says, "Are you feeling okay? You look a little pale--"

"I'm feeling bad, Mom," he tells her, and she's immediately at his side, brushing his hair from his face.

"Go to school, Jonathan," she says, levelly, "I'm gonna stay home with Will. He's gonna have to call in sick today."

"Are you sure, Mom?"

"Yeah, I'm sure, sweetie."

"Well," says Jonathan, "work's been stuck for evening shifts, and they're offered me one tonight from six 'til eleven..."

"Oh, baby, are you sure? It's a lot of work for you to do this week--"

"I'm sure, Mom," Jonathan says comfortingly. "I'll pick up some food on my way over, no worries."

Will closes his eyes - he doesn't want to hear this. It's bad enough knowing he's a problem for his house when he's well enough, but knowing he's just as much of a burden when he's sick is unbearable. He can't help but think that if only he'd fought off the demogorgon somehow - if he hadn't raced Dustin, if he hadn't been at Mike's house that night in 1983, if he had been a better son for his dad, if he hadn't been born at all--

"Sleep well, honey. I'll just be in the next room, okay?" says Joyce, kissing his hair. "You just shout if there's *anything* you need."

"I will," he says.

She shuts the door softly. Instead of that Free track, Will can hear her fainting dialing the school to explain that he's off sick. It's too warm under his sheets, but he burrows down in them anyway. There's no other way to escape the world.

Unfortunately, as with all extended periods of time spent hiding under covers, Will starts to run out of fresh air. When he resurfaces to breathe, he jumps back so violently that the headboard bangs against the wall.

As he'd come up from his plush enclosure, he'd spotted a figure at the foot of his bed. It's the man, the same man from before, except he's head on now, not stood in profile or with his back turned. That mane of matted hair falls limply over his face, obscuring it, and the cracking, shrivelled hands are twisting their claws into his bedsheets.

Will scrabbles against the drawers built into the headboard, pulling them all out. Crayons fly across the room. The bookshelf wobbles, and some of his hardback encyclopedias tumble onto the ground, their spines creaking with the sudden stress.

A picture he'd put in to press flat, and forgotten about since, drifts across the carpet. It's Mike's Paladin and Will's Cleric. Not Will the Wise, but the Priest rank he plays with now, Marsden Patience, and he's casting a healing spell on Cadwell the Protector.

The man's line of sight is sharply drawn to it, and he stares for a second. Or, at least, Will thinks it's a stare. He hadn't noticed it before, but there are dust motes floating lazily in the air around him, like some kind of aura made from dandelion seeds.

And then the man turns back.

He's not a man. His face is skull-like, with dented eyeballs sunk deep into the bone - what little skin is left is stretched taut over his forehead, and hangs loose from his cheekbones. Under the tattered rags he wears, a moth-eaten rib cage is visible. And god, the *smell*. The dust and the damp and the decay. It stings Will's eyes, but he barely notices, because whatever the thing is in front of him, it's baring two rows of beige, battered teeth in a horrifying leer.

It pulls itself onto the bed.

Will screams.

---

"Will!" Jonathan calls, over distant sizzling. "Rise and shiiiiiiiiine!"

Will careens out of his room, checking over his shoulder occasionally, and knocks a chair over in his haste. "Jonathan," he says breathlessly, "we gotta find one of those vans. The vans with the bad men in. They're looking for the actual thing, the thing that's after me, you gotta--"

Jonathan, his mouth dropping open, puts down the pan of French toast.

"Are you having another episode?" he says. He sounds frightened.

---

“Will!” Jonathan calls, over distant sizzling. “Rise and shiiiiiiiine!”

Will walks calmly into the kitchen. He still checks over his shoulder, in case the thing comes back for him. He can’t remember what happened before the reset, but it was bad.

“Jonathan,” he says, slowly, “I need you to listen to me, because you didn’t yesterday and I think you had me *sedated*. There’s something really, really wrong happening.”

Jonathan puts down the pan of French toast.

“Are you having another episode?”

“No,” Will says, trying not to let his eyes dart around the room in case it damaged his credibility again. “This is... this is *real*.”

“Shit,” Jonathan mutters, and turns off the stove. “I gotta make a call. Get dressed, Will.”

---

Will blinks himself into the world of the waking and weary, and immediately tries to turn over. When Jonathan shouts for him, he gets up and eats his French toast without complaint, and they drive to school in silence.

Well, Dr. Owens was out of the question, too. Will isn’t in a hurry to get sedated again. It pretty much resets Friday immediately, except instead of drifting into sleep and waking up naturally, he finds himself in the same morning with the ghost of a needle-prick in his neck.

Shakespeare. Biology. World Geography. Lunch.

“Hey,” murmurs Mike, before his scheduled babysitting rant. “Are you okay?”

“Yeah. Just thinking.”

“About what?”

Will steals a look at the others - Max is still on her story about not being able to wait for high school. He leans forwards. “Mike,” he starts, “do you ever feel like you’re stuck?”

Mike closes his D&D binder with a *snap* and sweeps the rest of his stuff into his bag. “Let’s go somewhere else,” he murmurs, getting up, and Will nods.

They trek through the paths of groups playing tag, and the girls sharing magazines, and the guys passing footballs, and eventually they settle in the open porchway of the sports field. Pressing their backs against the cool wooden panelling. Sinking to the floor. Will hugs his legs.

“I thought you were quiet today,” Mike says. He’s hugging his ring binder in a similar fashion. “What’s the matter?”

“This Friday’s never gonna end,” Will mumbles.

“I get ya. This History test is *definitely* going to bring my grade down.”

Will snorts. It’s true for him, too, but it’s kind of the least of his worries right now. “Yeah,” he says, “but, like... I don’t know. I just don’t think I’m ever gonna be *unstuck*.”

“Is this an Upside Down thing?”

Will nods. “I brought a piece of it back with me, the first time. I must’ve done. Either that, or I never left at all.”

“Hey, wait,” says Mike. He’s fixing him with that look, now, the look that only Mike can pull off. The concerned eyebrows hiding under his fringe, and the dry swallow he does when he’s getting ready to try to make someone feel better, and his expressive mouth twitching

downwards at its corners. “You definitely came back, of course you did. You’re *not* in the Upside Down anymore. You’re *not*.”

“Then why are the monsters still coming for me?” Will asks, in a very small voice.

“Because you’re the strongest out of all of us,” Mike reasons. “You’re our priest, right? You’ve got magic. Clerics fight the undead.”

“So do Paladins,” he points out, but Mike makes a face.

“So? You’ve got way more XP than I have. And you’re Neutral Good - you’ve got a lot more freedom with how you can be the best you can be.”

“I guess,” Will concedes.

Mike sticks an elbow into Will’s closest knee. “I’ve been looking into enemies we haven’t really used yet,” he smiles. It’s a little mischievous. “You, uh... You wanna see?”

“Are you working on a new campaign?”

“Fifty hours,” says Mike gleefully. It’s not news to Will, but the enthusiasm is contagious.

Mike lets the binder fall open over his crossed legs, and gestures for Will to shuffle closer. In the back, behind the manual, are photocopies and handwritten pages in plastic packets. Each monster, in alphabetical order, has a physical description, rather than a picture - Mike’s expanded the descriptions of the photocopy pages with his own annotations.

“This is *amazing*,” Will breathes, running a finger over the heading ‘*Banshee*’. “How long did this take you?”

“I’ve been doing it on and off for a few weeks.”

“A few *weeks*? You managed to keep that a secret from us all, for that long?”

It’s not accusatory - it’s proud, more than anything. Mike shrugs.

“Just wanted to make things more interesting. The variations on stuff? That’s really cool. I’ve learned a *lot*.”

“You’re a good Dungeon Master, Mike.”

“And you’re a great player,” Mike beams.

Will is wondering if he should ruin the moment *now*, or just have a terrible day tomorrow, when the end-of-lunch bell sounds.

“History,” Mike says, and snorts when Will grimaces. He sticks a hand out to help him to his feet: “c’mon, Byers. Gotta write those paragraphs about Jamestown, right?”

“Right,” says Will.

Tomorrow, he’s going to try to tell Mike. If the adults in his life, well-meaning as they may be, keep trying to control the situation for him? Well, he’s just gonna have to talk to someone who can control it *with* him.

## 4. Chapter 4

Will's memorized the passage from Macbeth they're studying, and he's always been pretty good at Biology anyway. He can go through today's lessons, step-by-step, without changing a darn thing. They're embedded in his brain. Apparently, that learn-by-repetition technique actually works. Who knew?

So when lunch comes around, it's a welcome break from the monotony of the cycle.

"Nancy's staying in to babysit me and Holly. Babysit! I'm *not* a baby--"

Sweep. Crash. Paper everywhere. Will crouches down to help.

"Mike?" he asks. "Can I talk to you? In the library, or something?"

Mike freezes. Instead of turning slightly pink, he turns scarlet instantly.

"Oh!" Will says, staring down at the drawing in his hands, "oh, no, it's nothing to do with that, you keep it. It's your reference. No, I just need your help with something."

"Okay," says Mike, scratching his nose awkwardly, and shoves all the loose paper into one plastic pocket before he packs up his things.

They shut themselves into an empty study room. Mike dumps his things on the desk; Will hovers awkwardly.

"Is everything alright, Will?" says Mike, with such concern in his voice that it makes Will's heart ache. It occurs to him that in every timeline, and on every day so far, it's not just been his family - Mike's always asked him how he is, no matter what.

"No," Will says, because he's sad, and tired.

"Oh," says Mike.

Where is he supposed to start?



“This is gonna sound crazy...”

“Try me.”

It’s so fierce. So fierce and determined. His lost confession notecards from the first night come to mind: *I like, I like, I love.*

“I’m stuck in this day,” he says, trying not to panic. “Like, *literally* stuck. Every time I go to sleep, I wake back up and it’s Friday.”

Mike pulls out a chair for him.

“I didn’t think you looked so good. Have you told your mom? Or Dr. Owens?”

“I tried to yesterday, and the day before. Or the last two Fridays, I guess. They think it’s me having an episode. Mostly it ends with me getting knocked out and waking up on Friday again.”

“Jesus Christ,” says Mike, and pulls out a chair for himself, too.

Will sits down heavily. “Wait,” he says, “w-wait, you believe me?”

“What?!! Of course I do!” Mike says. “If you say it’s not an episode, then it’s not an episode. Why would you lie about something like that? And who would know what’s real better than you?”

He shivers uneasily. “I don’t know. Sometimes I think that maybe I’m not so reliable. Y’know?”

“No!” Mike says, loudly. Will shushes him. “No,” he repeats, leaning in, both of them hoping no-one had heard, “you’re totally reliable. All that stuff before, that wasn’t you.”

Will’s still not sure.

It must show on his face, because Mike drags his chair closer and rests his head in one hand. “Can you prove it?” he asks, genuinely interested.

“Well,” Will begins.

Yeah. He thinks he can.

“You’re doing a new campaign. You told me. You think it’d be cool if I drew your new merchant lady, but you also said yesterday that you’ve been looking up monsters we haven’t used yet so that it’s more exciting.”

“I told you that?”

“Yeah,” Will smiles, “we were both pretty proud that you’d kept it from everyone. You were gonna work on developing the campaign tonight, it’s a fifty hour one.”

“Will. This is *insane*. You know the whole day!” Mike says.

“Mm-hmm.”

Mike shuffles uncomfortably, frowning: “Will... How long have you been here? In this Friday?”

“Not sure,” Will says honestly. “I lost count a little bit because I kept getting sedated when I panicked. And sometimes I’m not sure how I get back home when the cycle resets. I guess maybe... more than a week?”

“A week?!”

“You’d think I’d be better at the History test by now,” he adds.

“Holy shit, Will. Holy *shit*.”

More discomfort. “There’s... something else.”

Mike nods. *Continue*.

“A... man?” he says, not meaning for it to sound like a question. “Except his face is all... His whole body is all gross and decaying. It’s disgusting. And he’s dressed in rags, and his hair is nasty, and-- he’s got these claws, and these horrible eyes--”

“And you keep seeing him?!”

“He got me, a couple times,” Will confesses. “That’s when the day gets cut off and I wake back up in the morning again. He got you, too, once.”

Mike’s eyelashes flutter with a stab of anxiety, and Will immediately wants to take it back. But he can’t stop now.

“That’s not everything - there are creepy vans all over Hawkins, with these blue-overall workers in. They’re bad guys. They came for us once, because-- they think we’re linked to it?”

“Do you think we *are* linked to it?” Mike asks.

Will shrugs. “I don’t know. I definitely am. I think I dragged you into this mess with me, to be honest.”

“Don’t say that,” says Mike, looking hurt. It’s the way he says it that makes Will’s heart hurt again, as though there’s nothing better he’d like to be doing than going through terrible, traumatic other-worldly shit with William Byers.

The end-of-lunch bell cuts them off. For a second, they both stare at the clapper, vibrating crazily against the metal in the corner of the room, and then they get up.

“Come over, tonight,” Mike says.

“I can’t,” Will says, his voice cracking, “it got us when we tried.”

“Uh... Then... Let’s meet in the library?” Mike asks, forehead creasing with decisiveness. “We can go after school, and there’s loads of material there. I bet Jonathan would pick you up later. Okay?”

Will nods, and Mike reaches for the door handle. “Wait,” he says. “Material for *what?*”

And Mike grins. He grins a crazy, let’s-do-this grin. “We’re gonna find out what your monster is,” he says, in a much brighter voice, “and then we’re gonna bust you out.”

Will didn’t think he could fail his test any harder. The anticipation, however, sinks in. He barely writes a word.

"I'm positive that I flunked it," he says to Dustin, just for the predictability of it. Dustin tells him to shut up.

But, like, in a nice way.

Mike's behind his elbow, ready to ask Jonathan if they can go to the library; Lucas is already complaining he's hungry, so Will sidesteps to let the drama unfold.

"He's not gonna catch it," he mutters under his breath.

Mike looks up in alarm, just in time to see Max's '*cram an apple in it, Stalker!*', and flinches when the apple rolls across the hallway floor.

"Oh, god," he mutters back, "that's tragic. Let's just go."

Will's still smiling to himself as they're waiting in the parking lot for Jonathan's car to show up. When it pulls in, he's quick to accept the lift his brother offers to the library, and helps Mike to cram his bike into the back seat. He brushes off the questioning look with a shake of his head: *I'll explain later*.

Mike nods grimly.

Hawkins Public Library is, surprisingly, not one of Will's favorite places on Earth. It's too hot in there in the summer, too cold in there in the winter, and when school's out, it's full of whining children who don't like reading, whose parents have dragged them there to let the librarians babysit for an hour or two.

It *does* have some good reference books, and a wealth of magazines. But they're not allowed to be lent out. So Will occasionally darts in for a how-to-draw book, brings it back within the week, and rarely stays *inside* the building.

"I've been having to time all this so Dustin isn't here when I am," Mike confesses, locking his bike into the racks out front.

"I think it's really cool that you've been planning a new campaign like this," Will says.

"Yeah, well... I really wanted to tell everyone. You most of all," he

replies. His voice lowers as they trot into the building. "But it wouldn't have been fair to the others, so..."

"I get it. Don't worry." The place is mostly empty - some seniors, studying, and some old people shuffling around in the crime fiction - so they manage to get a whole table to themselves in the reference section. Mike immediately dumps his stuff and drags Will by the sleeve to the D&D manuals.

"I thought these got removed by that church group?"

"Me too," Mike beams, picking tomes from the shelf, "but Mr. Clarke tipped me off that someone had donated some more. That was a few weeks ago."

Will suddenly feels very guilty that he hadn't noticed Mike's absences in the evenings. They'd still met up for campaign sessions, of course, but Mike had been so withdrawn since he and El had parted ways that Will hadn't really considered he might've been doing something else entirely.

"Have you been lonely?" he asks timidly.

Mike bites his lip for a second, thinking about it, and then he breaks into a grin. "No way," he says. "I've been *undercover*."

Will struggles to keep his giggle quiet, and Mike similarly struggles to suppress some amused snuffling when he cracks open the book.

"These are some of the basic monsters," he says. "I figured we could start at 'A', work our way forwards, and see what kind of things might be similar to whatever's trapped you in the time loop. Sound good?"

"Yeah," Will nods, relieved.

They make a list. Will has notecards in his bag.

1) Can manipulate time.

2) Looks undead. (“And *smells* undead,” Will adds, which makes Mike snort.)

“Anything else?”

“Every time it gets near...”

Will swallows. He doesn’t like thinking about it.

“It feels like it’s reaching right into me,” he finishes. “Like a bad version of E.T., or something.”

Mike considers this - Will’s thankful he didn’t tell Dustin about the yesterFriday loop, because he would probably be doing unhelpful movie impressions right now.

3) Drains life force?

“Yeah,” says Will quietly. Mike’s pen hovers over the question mark, as though he intends to scribble it out, but ultimately decides to leave it be.

They pore over their respective manuals.

“Why the car?” Mike asks eventually, ruling out ‘Devil Swine’. He’d only really written it down because of the smell aspect of their identification.

“Oh,” says Will. His mouth is suddenly very dry. “Well, we refused a ride from Jonathan one time when we were heading back to yours? And, uh. That’s when it got us.”

“What did you do?”

“It was standing at the end of the back of Oak Street,” he remembers. “We took a shortcut so we didn’t have to go through the main square.

It wasn't even facing us - I tried to ask if he was alright, but it wasn't *human*, it came straight for us, Mike--"

*Mike grabs blindly for his hand. Will squeezes it.*

The memory of that comforting touch hits Will like a freight train - they'd both been scared, of course they had, but with Mike next to him, nothing was ever so bad. His mom and brother meant well, and would fight to the death for him, but they were stifling sometimes. Mike, on the other hand, was just as cautious, but a gentle, guiding force back into normalcy, rather than a cage.

His hand had been so warm. Will feels his face heat up, just from the memory of it.

Mike makes a *hey* noise, mistaking his flush for fear. "It's okay," he says, "we're gonna beat it. You and me. No more doctors or sedatives or undead monsters."

"No more Fridays," Will whispers.

"No more Fridays," Mike agrees. "What about an 'effigy'?"

"No, it's not fiery... It's more like a reanimation than a spirit."

And so it goes on - alphabetically, thoroughly, and painfully. Will rules out 'flameskull' and 'ghost' for the same, respective reasons he discarded 'effigy'. Mike's staring into the eyes of a 'lich' when Will next pipes up.

"You don't have to tell me," he says, "and I'm sorry if it's me being a busybody, but I wanted to ask--"

"Yeah?" says Mike immediately. He strikes a line through 'lich' on his notecard (*'magic-users, but skeletal'*) and scribbles out 'demilich' straight afterwards (*'little to no body'*).

"What happened? With... With you and El?"

Mike stares at the page.

"I'm sorry," Will starts to say. Mike wiggles his pen between two

fingers.

“No, no. It’s probably good that you asked me. I never really said anything about it, I know.”

“I didn’t wanna upset you,” Will explains. “So I never really asked.”

“It’s okay,” Mike says, smiling sadly, “it was just, like... I don’t know if you’ve ever confused that kinda thing before. I love her, and I wanna make sure she’s okay, y’know? And hang out with her and make jokes and talk about dumb stuff til midnight. But it wasn’t what I thought it was. Plus, I guess I felt bad because she doesn’t really understand a big chunk of the world yet, and here I was, pushing something onto her that she didn’t even know how to question.”

Will’s not sure why his character got to be called ‘the Wise’, when Mike’s so obviously the wisest of them all.

“Paladin move,” he jokes, nudging Mike in the ribs. It is a Paladin move - Mike sacrificing something for the greater good is so typically him. But Will says it to get a smile, and it works.

“Asshole,” Mike retorts.

Will grins, flustered and pleased. “So you, uh, figured out you didn’t like her like that?”

“What,” snorts Mike, “you’ve never had that? Where you’re friends with someone, and then it gets all weird and blurry?”

Mike’s right hand is stroking the corner of a manual between forefinger and thumb, like it’s itching to turn the page. When Will glances up, they hold each other’s stare for what feels like a very, very long time indeed. He can’t look away. Mike’s freckles bunch up around his eyes when he’s smiling, and it’s absolutely captivating.

“I think the library’s closing,” Will breathes.

“Oh,” says Mike.

And then:



“--oh! Shit, we didn't find your monster! What if we reset?”

“It's no big deal,” Will says, “honestly, I'll just--”

“Find me tomorrow,” Mike says fiercely. “Find me tomorrow, explain everything you did today, and we'll just continue past where we were. I'm not letting you stay in any more Fridays than you have to.”

“Okay,” says Will.

They slide their books back onto the shelves, and wait outside for Jonathan to pick them up. Mike's hand on Will's elbow is a lovely grounding force, but the hug he curls Will into is even better.

“I'll believe you,” he says, into Will's hair, and they both cling. “Just find me tomorrow, and I'll-- I'll always believe you.”

If Will cries a little bit, then no-one but he and Mike ever have to know. He doesn't stop himself from doing so.

Lying in bed that night, Will begs his brain to remember the parts they'd looked over already, sliding a mental bookmark into the past. It could be that it's too early to have hope, but Mike has that effect on him. Gosh, he hopes his Fridays are almost over - but it could also be that they're running out, which is a much, much scarier thought.

He wishes his notecards from the first night hadn't reset. At least that fear had been manageable.

## 5. Chapter 5

“Will!” Jonathan calls, over distant sizzling. “Rise and shiiiiiiiine!”

Will bolts awake.

He’s covered in a sheen of sweat again - there’d been dreams, last night, but they’d been the kind of dreams that dissipate like mist when consciousness rolls back in. Usually, he’d try to hang onto the last lingering threads of memory...

Not today.

His chest heaves. Another Friday. Another day of this hell. At least Mike will believe him, if he phrases it just right - he supposes it’s fair that everyone else brushes off his terror as delusions, before jumping to the worst conclusions, but being sensible hasn’t exactly helped him out over the last fortnight.

He coughs wetly, trying not to attract the attention of his mom or brother.

“*Find me tomorrow,*” Mike had said.

Come on, Byers. Calm down. You *got* this - you’re a Cleric, a *priest*, your wisdom is off the charts - so just breathe, breathe in, breathe out, calm down. There’s a helpful beat drifting through the wall.

When he stands up to examine himself in the mirror, Will presses his hand to the wall, and lets the steady bass brush against his fingertips.

Still here. Still home.

*I’m still me. I’m always going to be Will.*

His face is a little flushed, which makes a change to his usual Fridays - there’s actually color in his cheeks, this time around, and he feels a sharp shockwave of determination thrum through his bones. This is gonna be the day. Him and Mike, campaigning against worlds and waiting and every single clock they come across.

The corners of his mouth curl up around a mouthful of French toast. It'd been a little more than fifty hours, this one.

Jonathan returns his smile from over the breakfast table. "How are you this morning, buddy?"

"Pretty good," he says, with his mouth full. "I like your music this morning."

Jonathan's still beaming when Joyce bustles her way through into the kitchen. "Will, honey," she says, "good morning! You look like you're raring to go today--"

"I am, Mom," he laughs, barely fighting off her hair ruffling. "I was just thinking - can Mike come over tonight, if it's alright with Nancy? She's babysitting him whilst the Wheelers go to the theatre, so--"

"Oh, sweetie, you know Mike's welcome round any time. He can stay over if he wants to, just remember that I'm not home 'til ten thirty. Okay?"

Will nods happily and takes another massive crunchy bite out of his French toast.

And then something very, very weird happens. Joyce is jingling her keys, and starts to make her goodbyes, but Jonathan grabs her attention:

"Mom, I was wondering, uh... Since Eric left, work's been stuck for evening shifts, and they're offered me one tonight from six 'til eleven--"

Joyce takes one glance at Will and fixes her eldest son with an uneasy look. "Jonathan," she starts, "I don't know..."

"I could see if--"

"Mike's gonna be with me," Will interrupts, "so I won't be by myself. It'll be fine, Mom."

She fiddles with her keys, and bites her lip, and seems to make a decision. "Okay," she says, and both boys brighten-- "okay, but you

call me at the store if anything happens, you got it? And you call Jonathan, too. I mean it.”

“I know, Mom, I will,” Will says.

“Thanks, Mom--”

“Yeah, thanks, Mom! See you tonight!”

“You’d better be in bed by then!” she titters, and pockets her keys. Joyce gives Jonathan a kiss on the cheek, gives Will a little wave, and breezes her way out of the house.

Jonathan takes his pan to the sink, shaking his head in disbelief: “I can’t *believe* you convinced her, holy crap, Will.”

“Me neither,” says Will. He feels a little dazed.

Come on, Byers. Make this the final Friday.

On the way to school, he wonders if this is all going to end horribly - some big things end okay, but some result in less-than-ideal outcomes, and some *little* things end okay but others are positively catastrophic.

He sits back in his seat subtly, as Jonathan shivers in the driver’s seat. “There’s another one of those trucks,” he says, pointing with his hands still on the wheel. Will knows what he means. He doesn’t have to look and check and draw attention to himself, no sir.

“Maybe they’re still keeping a watch over us, huh?”

Jonathan shrugs. “Maybe.”

“I bet Hopper’s got it under control, whatever it is,” Will adds, just for the hell of it, and Jonathan grins.

“Yeah, I bet he does.”

‘Do Anything You Wanna Do’ is still playing lightly on the car radio, and Will turns it up without asking. They’re still in a vicious head-bopping competition, or as vicious as it can become without

Jonathan getting pulled over, by the time they roll up to the Middle School.

He shares a lot of classes with Mike. English class is one of them. They're sat on opposite sides of the room, sure - 'B' for Byers is nowhere near 'W' for Wheeler, obviously - but they still manage to sneak knowing looks and silent inside jokes across the desks. On this Friday in particular, Mike tends to shoot him a lot of reassuring and concerned glances. The passage they're studying isn't exactly the most comfortable material for Will to read.

Which is why Mike gapes at him after it's read aloud by one of their classmates.

Will doesn't notice that he's mouthing along the words to their study material until it's been completed: *fill me from the crown to the toe top-full // of direst cruelty*, it reads, *Make thick my blood*. It's only when he licks his lips and feels a hot stare eating into his temples that he looks over, and--

*oh.*

"You memorized the whole passage in two days?!" Mike says incredulously, on the way to Biology.

"More like two *weeks*," Will mumbles.

"What are you talking about? We only started that bit on Monday."

"Look," Will says, turning on his heel. He stops so suddenly that Mike almost walks into him. "Something really weird is happening to me, Mike, but you can't tell the others-- can I talk to you properly? Later on?"

"I," says Mike quietly, and licks his lips, "yeah. Yeah, of course you can."

And so Biology goes, and World Geography passes, and then Mike's leaning against Will's locker when lunchtime rolls around.

It makes his heart go all funny. He tries his best to ignore it.

"This isn't, like," Mike says, "I don't know, a *thing*, is it? A bad thing?"

"Not sure," Will says tiredly.

"An episode?"

"No, this is a real thing."

"What's happening?"

Will loves how Mike asks that question. He never says it as though he's entitled to the information. He never says it like he's got a right to know how crappy Will's feeling. He says it like he wants to fix everything.

Will closes his locker.

"I know what happens. This whole day," he says.

"Macbeth?" Mike asks.

"And the rest."

They make a start towards the cafeteria - Dustin, Lucas, and Max have just had Math, so they're already in there, saving seats.

"I'm stuck in this Friday," Will explains. "I told you yesterday, and we were looking for monsters to try to find out what it is that's keeping me here."

Mike frowns. "I don't remember that."

"Not Thursday - the Friday in the cycle before today," Will says, "yesterFriday, I've been calling it. The day resets, and no-one can remember anything. No-one except *me*."

"God, Will, that's horrible."

"I love how you're so ready to believe me," Will's mutinous mouth lets slip. He can feel the heat pouring from his face already.

Mike stops just before they enter the cafeteria: "I don't think you've

ever lied to me,” he says, sincere as can be, and Will blinks owlshly. Oh, god, it was probably true.

“I’ll let you know what’s gonna happen, anyway,” he says, and they push open the doors. Immediately they’re assaulted by a barrage of noise - ah, middle school lunchtimes. The loudest event in all of Hawkins.

“Why?” asks Mike.

Will wrinkles his nose, feeling mischievous - “because it’s *funny*,” he says, and Mike grins too.

So it continues as normal, for the most part. Max blushes when she sits next to Lucas, and scowls at anyone who might bring it up. Dustin wheezes when she cracks jokes that would make a sailor blush, and Lucas eats what might be the biggest lunch ever.

“They’re going out tonight to see some play or something,” Mike’s says to Max, “so Nancy’s staying in to babysit me and Holly. Babysit! I’m *not* a baby--”

He gestures a little too wildly, but Will’s paying attention, and he’s always been keen to prove himself. Instead of the D&D binder being swept onto the floor, Will cups a hand around the edge of the table. The little action catches Mike’s eye, who lunges in alarm at his clumsiness, and--

Well, they save the binder. Mike’s hands are curled around Will’s, having gotten there second - one pair flat on the plastic sheets, and one set underneath the half of the case that’s in danger of meeting the cafeteria floor.

Mike does his best impression of a fire hydrant.

“Thanks,” he mumbles.

“Way to go, Will!” Lucas says. He looks pretty impressed.

The conversation resumes, but Mike leans over: “you knew that was gonna happen?” he asks.

Will nods.

“What are we gonna do about it?”

“Library, after school,” Will murmurs back, “and you can stay over afterwards, too? I’ll explain everything on the way.”

With that, they see lunchtime right through to the end. When Dustin wishes them luck for the test, and Mike bursts out laughing when Will pulls the most disgusted face he can muster up. The clock remains five minutes slow, and he’s still anxious he might’ve flunked it when they re-emerge, but at least he wrote more than he’s ever written before.

“I think I did okay.”

“Really?” Dustin says, packing his books into his locker, “you kinda looked like you thought you’d flunked it. I got worried for a second.”

“Yeah,” Will smiles. Mike’s leaning on the lockers again, making his heart flip-flop, non-stop, oh *gosh*.

Turning his back on Dustin, who’s preoccupied with cramming all his work in *spectacularly* haphazardly, Will decides to mouth along to the words:

*“You studied for like, two solid weeks for that dumb test,”* he’s saying kindly, *“all you’ve been doing since it was announced it drawing up those little notecards--”*

Dustin finally slams the locker door shut, with some considerable effort, and takes in the scene in front of him. “What?” he demands. “What’s so funny?”

“Nothing,” says Will, masking his face with perfect seriousness whilst Mike creases beside him.

Lucas trudges over from his own locker. He looks positively crestfallen: “How am I so hungry? I had the biggest lunch ever,” he says, completely dismissive of whatever conversation may have been happening before he arrived. It’s a quality unique to teenage boys, Will’s found; Max always wanted to know what they were discussing



prior to her arrival, unless she already knew.

“Maybe you’re in for a growth spurt,” Mike suggests.

“Yeah,” Dustin adds, “growing into an even bigger dork.”

Will jabs his elbow into Mike’s hip. “Watch this,” he says, out of the corner of his mouth, just as Lucas is protesting that *‘if anyone’s the dork here, it’s you’*--

Max breezes past them, and Will and Mike turn with the emphasis of her entrance. “Cram an apple in it, Stalker!” she grins. Her underhand throw is perfect - Lucas, however, is as dumbfounded as he was on Will’s first Friday.

Which is kinda sweet, but at the same time, Will knows what’s about to happen.

He catches the apple. Not one-handed, as he had done so that first occasion he’d caught it, but it still looks pretty cool. Everyone’s staring, and the pleasure of that hasn’t worn off after the previous time, Will’s pleased to note. (Although he does realize that he’s even better at keeping his cool after some practice, which only makes him feel *cooler*.)

“Holy shit,” says Dustin.

“Yeah, great catch, Byers!” Max beams. “We’ll make a pitcher of you yet!”

Lucas gapes as Will hands him the apple.

“If you don’t eat this,” Will says seriously, “I’m gonna be mortally wounded.”

Dustin, Lucas, and Max all bicker their way out of the middle school by themselves, after various congratulations from the trio. Mike nudges Will’s shoulder on their way out to the parking lot. “You made that look awesome,” he grins.

“Thanks,” Will grins back.

“Have you done that every day?”

“Only once,” Will says, after some consideration, “and it looked cooler that time. But I don’t mind.”

Mike wheezes. His feet momentarily stop crunching over the asphalt, and Will looks over his shoulder to smile lopsidedly at him.

“What the hell is going on?” Mike says, still laughing. “Have you told anyone else? Why isn’t it fixed yet?”

So whilst they’re waiting for Jonathan to pull up, Will gives him the shorthand of the whole thing. The sedation, the undead man, their encounter with it on Oak Street, the changes in his Fridays and how they ended up - the library trip, and the narrowing down they’d gotten up to, until the day had reset again.

Mike loads his bike into Jonathan’s backseat, and does a very, *very* good job of being cheerful until they pull up to the library.

“Thanks for the lift, Jonathan--”

“No problem. Tell your sister I’ll pick her up tomorrow night, okay?”

Mike nods enthusiastically, trying to ignore Will’s gagging motions behind him. He also does a pretty good job of that, too.

As he’s using the library’s public payphones, calling Nancy to let her know he’s staying the night, Will meanders his way into the library and picks out all the reference books that Mr. Clarke had told Mike were available. They’re all spread out on the table by the time his friend returns, at the appropriate places they’d left off.

“Let me guess,” Mike says, throwing down his rucksack. “We already got this far--”

“--yesterday. Yeah,” says Will. He slides over the checklist they’d drawn up yesterday, which he’d dredged up from his memory banks. “We got up to ‘demilich’, but you were checking the other versions of monsters, just in case.”

“I’ve been coming here,” Mike starts to confess, and then apparently

realizes that Will's heard all of this before. "When... Dustin isn't here? I had to time it? I bet you already knew."

"You did mention," Will admits.

Mike's very quiet for a minute. It's as though he's taking everything in. He examines the notecard with the list on.

*1) Can manipulate time. 2) Looks undead. 3) Drains life force?*

It's all stuff Will mentioned earlier, but he scowls, as if seeing written evidence of the monster's traits were somehow offensive. Made it more real.

"Did I say anything else?" he asks.

Will shifts in his seat, and flicks open his copy of *Dragon* magazine. "You've said a lot of stuff on a lot of Fridays."

"Like what?"

Will thinks.

"Like... There's a picture by me in your ringbinder of the party, and you've been using it for reference. A-and, uh, your campaign? It's fifty hours. You told me about you and El. You told me that I was the strongest out of all of us, even though I don't think that's true--" Mike makes a noise of protest that he quickly cuts off, because they're in the library. "And," Will finishes, "you said... You said you'd always believe me."

Mike is stunned.

"You said to find you tomorrow," Will repeats, "because you'd always believe me. You're the *only* person who's believed me, Mike."

There's no more words, after that. They stare at each other for a second - Mike's echoing promise suddenly sounds a lot more adult

than the childish vow it had been at the time. Then Mike breaks into a grin, with Will quickly following, and they return to their elimination with renewed enthusiasm.

“You know,” Mike says at one point, scribbling out ‘spectre’, “if I were stuck in a time loop, I bet I’d pull *way* more stupid shit than you’ve probably been doing.”

Will opens a newer copy of *Dragon* magazine, and frowns questioningly.

“Dumb stuff. You know,” he says again. “Stuff like, I’d tell Mrs. Hart that she’s rude and I don’t give a crap about running track. Or something like, I’d eat pancakes and syrup all day, just because I could. The world gets reset, right? So it’d all go back to normal and it wouldn’t matter. You could do ridiculous things or dangerous things without any consequences at all. Haven’t you done anything like that?”

A shiver runs down Will’s spine, all the way down the backrest of his chair.

“I guess. But I kinda had bigger things to worry about when it happened.”

“That’s fair,” Mike nods. “Hey, if we don’t manage to fix things today, then I promise you can say anything you like to me and *then* we’ll reset, and it’ll be fine in the morning...”

But Mike’s childish tirade is lost on Will, whose face is the perfect mask of surprise. He starts flicking through his magazine frantically--

“Will? Did you find something?!”

“Maybe we’ve been doing this wrong,” he says.

“What do you mean? It’s not a monster?”

“No,” he says, realisation dawning on him so quickly that it was so far past dawn, it was practically *noon*-- “I mean, look at the top of our list. We made time manipulation the most important quality, but what if it’s not? What if it’s an additional thing that makes the other

qualities stronger?”

Mike’s eyes widen comically. “You mean, like, a variation?”

“Yeah, we should be focusing on variations, not just considering them,” Will says. “We’ve been prioritizing the wrong thing.”

Mike squints at the last two points: “looks undead,” he says, slowly, “drains life force. *Drains life force*. Hang on--”

He starts turning pages, flipping all the way to the back of the hardcover book he’s been perusing, and Will watches over his shoulder. Mike’s muttering now, drawing his finger down the columns of text. He’s checking through every single line.

“Here--”

“A wight? Are you sure?”

They’re one of the first monsters the Party ever fought together - they’re so common in-game, so frequently encountered, that it would have been like suspecting Dustin. Mostly they avoid them - Lucas is the only one with a high enough level to really take them on casually - but there have been a few nasty run-ins from time to time.

“Wight... *These creatures are most evil and hateful, seeking to destroy any life form they encounter. Wights shun bright lights and hate sunlight,*” Mike reads. “*These monsters exist simultaneously on the normal and negative planes of the material plane, yadda yadda technical stuff...*”

Will stares at the accompanying picture. His blood runs icy cold.

“*This existence allows them to drain life energy levels - one such level each time they score a hit on an opponent.* Does this sound right, Will?”

“Yeah,” he croaks, and taps the image with a shaky, shaky fingertip. “That’s it. That’s the man we saw.”

Mike narrows his eyes. The shambling body, the too-tight skin - the ragged hair and the tattered clothes. Claws curled in on shrunken hands. It was all there.

The two of them are distracted, at about the same time, but the sentence at the end of the description.

*Any human totally drained of life energy by a wight will become a half-strength wight under control of its slayer.*

“We can’t let this happen,” Mike murmurs.

Will almost gets caught up in how Mike’s changed, since their first encounters with the Upside Down - he often says ‘we’, now, when talking about action, instead of ‘I’. *I can’t let this happen*, Mike of two years ago would’ve said. Mike of today says ‘we’ like he would say ‘you and I’.

“Can we go home?” Will asks timidly. “I’m kinda hungry. And tired.”

“I’m not *surprised*,” Mike says, but he gathers up all their books whilst he’s saying it. “You’ve been battling a life-eating monster for two weeks, Will, that’s enough to tire anyone out.”

The walk home is tense. No books, limited knowledge, and the fear of the Wight around every corner - Will’s muscles are knotting themselves up every time he flinches. Until, eventually, Mike heaves out a huge sigh:

“C’mon.”

He swings his leg over his bike seat, ready to ride instead of push it all the way back to the Byers’ house, and beckons with a nod.

Will, picking at the sleeves of his coat, doesn’t move.

“C’mon, Will,” Mike says, gesturing him over with a hand this time. “You can ride backsies. I think we’ll still fit.”

That reassures him more, because it sets off a little laugh in his lungs that he can’t keep down, and it’s oddly calming. A little like hysterics, Will thinks idly. He climbs onto the back of the bike seat anyway.

“Hold on,” Mike says cheerfully.

Will grips the metal frame, scratching his nails down the chrome.

But Mike heaves out another enormous huff. “Hold on to *me*, moron,” he says kindly, “it’s downhill, I don’t want you to fall off. Our balance isn’t so great now we’re bigger.”

Hesitantly, Will places his hands on Mike’s waist - he kind of feels like he’s preparing for a nerve-wracking first dance. “Are you sure about this?” he asks.

“You betcha,” says Mike, and kicks off the sidewalk. There’s a lurching moment where the bike wobbles - but then it levels off, and the two of them go gliding downhill. Will clings. He wants to say sorry for bunching his hands in Mike’s jacket, but he’s too taken aback to form words just yet.

To Mike’s credit, the journey is smooth-sailing practically all the way to Will’s front door. By the time they hit the grittier track leading up to the house, Will’s resting his chin against one of Mike’s shoulder blade, and only has to stop because the ride gets bumpier.

“There’s TV dinners in the freezer, I think,” Will says absently, fishing out his key from his pocket, “but we could make grilled cheese, I’m pretty sure.”

“That sounds great.”

Mike no longer wanders into their living room like he’s expecting to see crazy plastered all over the walls, which is refreshing, because literally everyone else scans the stripped walls for any trace. He simply follows his way through the doorways, waiting for Will to lead him somewhere.

“I’m sorry,” Will says.

“What?”

Will dumps his jacket and bag, and heads to the fridge to pull out ingredients. “I keep dragging you into this,” he says, busying himself with a slab of cheese. Mike grabs the bread bag and starts laying slices onto plates.

“No, you don’t,” Mike says immediately.

"I *do*. It was my fault that the Wight got us when we were on Oak Street. And my fault that the bad-men vans spotted me, and came after us. And then they were saying that you were at the middle of it all." He fishes a pan from one of the cupboards: "if I weren't here, you'd probably be safe from the Wight too."

Mike sets the tub of margarine down on the counter with a dull *thud*.

"No-one's safe if you're not safe," he says, staring at the woodwork with some unknown emotion, something so strong and so barely-restrained. "Ever since we were kids. That's how it is, Will, we stick together. All these things that happen to you, they're *never* your fault."

Will doesn't reply; he might burst into tears if he tries to deny it, however true he believes his denial to be. He fixes his eyes on the wall as they assemble their dinner, ready to flip it in the pan. The kitchen clock is five minutes fast.

Whilst he's turning over their first attempt, he jumps - there's a weight resting against the back of his head, just below his crown. Mike's pressing his forehead to the hair there, and one of his hands is lightly brushing the back of Will's elbow. It's as though he's trying to convince himself that Will's still there - that he hasn't slipped back into a loop of the same old Friday again.

At least, not just yet.

"I wonder if we can kill it," Mike says idly, swallowing a huge mouthful of bread. Will notices that nowadays, when he's sitting at the Byers' dining table, his legs are too long to swing his feet. "I bet we can get a silver weapon tomorrow, maybe that would work."

"What if it doesn't?"

"I don't know," he admits. "Maybe we can figure it out in the morning? Oh... Wait."

"Yeah," Will grumbles, "it's not ideal."

"Well, come tell me the Wight thing and that'll save us about an hour, right?" Mike beams, and Will almost chokes on crumbs laughing. A



bit more than an hour. More like a couple of days.

They clear away the plates and retreat to Will's room, too antsy to watch TV but too anxious to head outside. Mike asks him what he usually planned on doing on Friday evening - Will must turn a frightening shade of pale, because Mike doesn't ask again. Instead, Will pulls out the encyclopedias he'd forgotten he'd pressed artwork into, and systematically smooths them out on his desk, showing Mike the pieces he'd previously overlooked. And when they've sifted through the stack, scattering them around on Will's bedroom floor, Mike wordlessly reaches for a box of Othello and starts to set it up. Chess is too complex and long to be enjoyable right now - Othello's one of their favorites, because you can actually fit a game of it into lunch period without being interrupted.

"I kind of lied," Will admits. He reaches out and starts to fiddle with a lone crayon, twirling it between his fingers. If he can draw imaginary lines and trace the anxious twists winding around his heart right now, then maybe it'll make it feel more like art and less like real life.

"About what?"

He watches Mike place his first move: "you know when we were talking about doing stuff because there weren't any consequences? In the time loop?"

Mike's attention is instantly caught. "Will Byers! *You* pulled some stupid shit?"

"I didn't mean to," he laughs, and he hopes harder than anything that it doesn't sound as shaky as he feels. "It just kind of happened."

He sets his second piece on the board. He's playing as black. Mike's playing as white.

"What was it?" Mike asks hopefully. "Did you pants Keith? Did you fill Troy's locker full of bees?"

"How would those 'just happen'?!" Will says, giggling into the back of his hand. "No, it wasn't a doing thing, it was a *saying* thing. I told

Jonathan a secret.”

And suddenly, though the board’s filling up and they need to focus on tactics right now, Mike’s attention seems to have been turned on him in its entirety. He’s struck by another pang of thick, panicky indecisiveness - does he really want to tell Mike the truth? Can he even handle what might happen if it all goes horribly wrong?

As if reading his thoughts, Mike smiles reassuringly and holds up one of the reversible playing pieces. “You don’t have to tell me,” he says, pressing the piece against Will’s face. He seems to be examining Will’s complexion - it must be pretty close to the white side of the chip.

“I don’t know if I can explain it to you,” Will says. He’s looking at the piece from the corner of his eye. “I sorta just... ended up saying it bluntly to Jonathan. I didn’t mean to. I hadn’t even used the word I did until that point--”

“Hey, it’s okay,” says Mike. That smile never falters for a second.

He’s throwing words around in his head, watching as Mike flips the piece to black and sets it on the board - god, what had he written on those dumb notecards? He’d been so concerned with how his family would take it that he’d hardly even thought about his friends - that had been an elusive step in his plan that hadn’t come to fruition yet.

Mike says, “it’s your move, Will,”

just as Will says, “I think I like boys?”

The silence between them is broken when Will accidentally snaps an inch off the crayon he’s fiddling with. A big waxy chunk of yellow flies across his bedroom, and they both blink, startled.

“Oh,” says Mike.

Will starts to laugh.

It’s small, and quiet, at first - but it evolves into something bigger, where Mike joins in and their shoulders are shaking, and for one, lovely moment, they forget all about the time loop and the Wight.

"That's okay, Will!" Mike says, and lets pieces fall through his hands. Lets them tumble to the floor in a little pile. "That's okay! Is that what you told Jonathan?"

"Yeah," he says, still grinning. He finally places a black counter on the board, on one of the edge squares, and Mike huffs. "He got mad at me because I said sorry to him."

Mike shrugs. "Don't be sorry, then," he says. Like it's the easiest thing in the world.

"Do you... Do you still wanna stay over?"

The reaction is instant, like Mike's been stung - he jolts the board reaching for Will's sleeve, and the Othello pieces rattle. "Of course I do," he says, looking hurt, "Will, you're my *best friend*. So you have a love secret - well, of course you do! I can't think of anything else for you to have a secret about. C'mon. You're *always* full of love."

"So you don't mind?" he asks. His words are more breath than voice.

Mike breaks into a huge smile. There's a light dusting of pink making its way across his freckled face. "I don't mind if you don't mind," he says, and Will laughs - Will laughs a big, big laugh of relief - because Mike doesn't mind and Will doesn't mind. Not one little bit.

When darkness starts to blanket Hawkins, blotting out what little evening light streams through the trees by the Byers house, Will and Mike end up sprawled out on Will's bed. They're tired, but not tired enough to sleep - it's a comforting, dozy sort of semi-consciousness that they're slipping into, and the conversation comes easily.

"What if the Wight comes?"

"Then... Then I'll beat it back. With my bare hands! Hey, wait, don't laugh at me, it's like, all rotting and falling apart anyway - I bet I could do some damage--!"

"Mike, *no*. I think the Wight would beat *you* back first."

"Eh. Power of friendship. I'd totally win."

“You sound like Dustin.”

Mike props himself up on his elbow and peers over at him. They’re not even under the covers. They’re barely in pyjamas, having been too lazy to do anything more than throw on some old t-shirts and sweats. Mike’s cuffs come up to his mid-shins, which Will keeps glancing at and giggling periodically.

“Listen,” Mike says, poking him in the ribs good-naturedly. His eyes are starting to lid with drowsiness. “Dustin’s not here. You’re *stuck* with me, Byers.”

Will laughs into his pillow. “Could be worse, I guess.”

Something changes, at that point - the sleepy contentedness remains in the air, but a solemn edge to the conversation emerges, and it hadn’t been there before. Mike drops his head and murmurs something into his shoulder.

“Hmm?”

“I said,” he repeats, sitting up again, “I’m sorry. Y’know... In case I’m not here in the morning.”

Will wants to say: *it’s not your fault*. He wants to say that they’ve made progress today, and that he’s got hope for the first time in almost two weeks, and he wants to say that this particular Friday has been his favorite Friday.

Will wants to say a lot of things, but he settles on:

“You’re here *now*.”

He says it like it’s all that matters.

(He thinks maybe it is.)

Mike falls asleep with one hand’s fingers curled in Will’s shirt sleeve, just above the elbow, and Will falls asleep with his fringe tickling Mike’s chin. Neither one of them stir for a very, very long time.

## 6. Chapter 6

He doesn't register it at first, of course. The memories are dimmer, somehow. Will remembers the muted browns of his room giving way to beams of warm yellow, and feels a spike of panic, until--

"Will, sweetie? I'm home."

"Oh. Hi, Mom."

"Did I wake you?" she whispers frantically, "I'm so sorry, baby. I'll see you in the morning, okay?"

"Yeah," Will mumbles, turning over to leech Mike's body heat again, "I hope so."

He cracks open an eye, and catches sight of his mother's weary face. Again, he's witness, but he doesn't *register* what's going on; her features are softened with fondness. Whatever she's seeing, it's making her fight off a smile.

The crack in the door seals itself, and Will drifts back into sleep.

---

When he manages to blink his way into the waking world, attempting to turn over and wrap himself into more of his blankety cocoon, Will discovers that there's something in the way.

There's something in the way. *Someone* in the way.

Holy shit. Did he sleep at all?

That must be it. Yeah, Will must have taken a quick nap and awoken on the same night, before the reset - what other explanation could there be, for Mike Wheeler's limbs tangled into every corner of his bed?

Unless. *Unless.*

He slides out of the cover cocoon, letting his feet pad across the carpet. The first thing he's hit with is an overwhelming absence. No sizzling, no 'rise and shine', no hairdryer noises, and after he presses his ear to his bedroom wall - yep, no 'Child' by Free, or music at all, drifting over from Jonathan's room.

"Will?"

"Mike, listen," he breathes, hardly daring to believe it.

Mike sits up. The crinkles of Will's pillowcase are embossed into the side of his face. "What?" he says suspiciously, squinting with the effort of listening out for an unknown.

"*Exactly.* Nothing!" he says gleefully, "look, there's bits of crayon on the floor. I snapped that! And-- oh my gosh, *I won Othello.*"

"Don't be a sore winner," laughs Mike. It's clear he doesn't mean it. "Does this mean it's Saturday?"

"Oh my gosh. *Mike.* I hope so."

God, his room is a mess. There's paper and games and stuff everywhere, but in all fairness, he's not had to tidy it up for two weeks. He's almost too scared to open the door into the hallway, but luckily, Mike's dragging his feet across the carpet to meet him there.

"I don't wanna jinx it," he says carefully, smoothing his hair down, "but I've got a bad feeling about this."

Will wants to say something along the lines of, '*wow, Mike, I hate that you just said that*'. But he doesn't. "Me too," he ventures, instead, "know what?"

"What?"

"I wish I *had* pantsed Keith," he says grimly.

Mike splutters. "No-one needs to see *that*, Will, oh my god."

“Would’ve been funny, though.”

“Yeah,” Mike nods. He reaches for the handle, and, before Will can stop him, easily pulls the door open.

Light pours in from the hallway. It’s pretty clearly the morning now, and a sunny one at that.

Mike frowns. His mouth is slightly open.

“What do you think happened?” he says. “Do you think the cycle broke by itself? Has this been linear for you, too? I wonder what happened to the Wi--”

“Breakfast,” Will says desperately.

“Oh. Yeah,” says Mike. He looks Will over: “yeah, you need that, let’s go get breakfast.”

Will almost trips over himself in his race to reach the kitchen cupboards, and practically tears them off their hinges to forage around for cereal.

“The cereal’s still gonna be there in the next five minutes,” Mike says, watching Will jam his hand straight into the packaging. “It’s not going anywhere. Cross my heart.”

“Oh my god,” Will groans. He’s shovelling frosted corn flakes into his mouth with wild abandon. “I could cry.”

“I’ve never seen you so happy to be eating cornflakes.”

“I’ve never *been* so happy to eat cornflakes,” he agrees, swallowing down with some difficulty, “I’m never eating French toast *ever again*, oh, man.”

Mike isn’t listening anymore. That parted-lips frown is back again, when Will looks up. His mouth tends to fall slightly open when he’s in the middle of an epiphany, as though he’s taking a breath to vocalize his thoughts, but can’t think of where to start; evidently, it’s a struggle to find the words in this moment, too.

“What?”

Mike blinks. “The clock,” he says simply.

Oh. Oh, *yeah*. Will hauls himself to his feet, still cradling the box of cornflakes - there’s something really, really wrong with the clock. At first it looks normal. Still loud and ticking, still five minutes fast. But on closer inspection, the second hand is all over the place: *one, two, three, four, five, six-- six, eight-- four-- one, two...*

“That’s weird,” Will says. He’s hoping the sinking feeling in his stomach is just the sensation of food that *isn’t* French toast, settling and feeling new, but Mike’s attention is on the screen door now and the feeling’s getting worse.

“Is this new?” Mike asks, holding a palm up against the sun.

“Yeah... I guess. It’s not part of yesterFriday, that’s for sure.”

Mike twists his hand in the light - the dust motes, floating in front of the screen door, keep jumping back into place are a few seconds. Tiny flecks of gold, caught in a loop. It’s like when Jonathan’s car hits a pothole and the tape deck skips.

“What alignment is a Wight?” Will asks.

“Lawful Evil. Why, do you think your Wight is too?”

“I don’t know,” he says carefully, “but think about it. If a Wight’s bound to a Lawful alignment then it has to use rules, right? A time loop like yesterFriday, that’s a defined thing. And I was bound to it, but now it’s breaking.”

“Yeah, I don’t think we’re totally in Saturday, yet.”

They lock eyes. Mike’s hand is still drenched in golden sunlight, but he retracts it quickly: “wanna go find out?” he asks, and Will nods.

“Let’s go investigate,” he says, smiling in spite of himself. At least if he was stuck in a yesterSaturday now, he’d be with Mike, which was a lot more fun.



The two of them creep over to Jonathan's room, barefoot on the new carpet that Joyce had arranged to be replaced last year. Will knocks before he tries the handle; it echoes in a disturbingly unnatural way, reverberating backwards and forwards like the ripples of a tuning fork.

"Jonathan...?"

Mike dutifully hangs back when the door creaks open. When Will's satisfied that Jonathan's not in any state of undress, or something equally as mortifying, he pushes the door open fully.

"Oh, jeez."

Jonathan looks super, super tired after his night of work, but with a Saturday shift to get to that afternoon, he's already up and at 'em. Sort of. He's in the process of placing the needle onto a record for that morning, and Will silently sends up thanks that it's not *Free at Last* tucked under his arm. Instead, it's *Rumours*.

"I didn't know your brother liked Fleetwood Mac," Mike grins, peering under Jonathan's forearm to look at the track listing on the record sleeve.

"As far as *you're* supposed to know, he doesn't."

"Which one's he trying to put it on?"

Will follows Jonathan's line of sight - he keeps flickering back to the start of whatever time cycle this is, jerking into his original position every five seconds or so. Tongue poking out, eyes narrowing, fingers pinched around the arm of the stylus...

"Maybe the third track or so?"

"'Never Going Back Again'," Mike says instantly, and stands up straight. "Lucas' mom plays that pretty much every time she gets in a car."

"You're really not panicking about this, are you?" says Will.

Mike shrugs, and takes care not to bump into Jonathan on his way

out of the room. "I'm not alone," he says plainly. "Do we check on your mom, too? I'd feel weird doing that."

"Yeah, I'm not gonna," says Will. "It doesn't look like anything bad's happening. It just feels like a shorter version of the loop I was stuck in on Friday. Which means that the Wight's still out there, right?"

"Probably."

Will's face betrays *everything* these days. He should really get a hold over that.

"But," Mike says quickly, "but the Wight's hold must be slipping, right? Why else would the time have changed?"

"Maybe to drag you into it, too."

He leans his lower back against the dining table, tapping worried fingers against the coffee-stained wood. God, he's so miserable. No hope of getting out, no notecards, just guilt and the same damn hours, over and over again.

"I'm part of it already," Mike says, "you said yourself, the bad-men vans took after us! I was already wrapped up in it. I wouldn't be surprised if this was affecting someone or something else, too. So stop worrying - clearly we're doing *something* right, if it can't keep us in just one Friday."

Will rubs his arm over his sleeve. He can see a breeze start up through the window, bending the trees across the way, until they snap back upright and wait for the wind again; a literal stand-still. "Yeah, you're right," he says, "I'm sorry. Thanks for staying with me. I was really scared, and you were there. You always are. So... Thanks."

"Anytime," Mike says sincerely.

And holy hell, Will has to grip hard onto the edge of the table, just in case he keels over. His heart feels like it's in zero-gravity. Everything's becoming rapidly clear.

"--and we could check up on everyone. You could leave the house in

yesterFriday, so I bet *we* could leave now, right? And see if we can contact the guys who are after the Wight. Or see if Hopper can help us. Do you think he'd mind if we, um... *borrowed* a silver weapon, if we find one in town?"

"I... I don't know. Probably."

"Yeah, you're right. But who cares? Let's kill us a Wight, Hopper isn't even here."

"No-one's here, technically," Will points out. "Everyone's frozen in those five seconds. It's just you and...."

He pauses.

*Just you and me*, he'd wanted to say. He's not going to, but now Mike's staring at him, because he'd trailed off and not given any explanation for it. Oh, *no*, he wants an answer. His face is saying it, loud and clear - that enthusiasm gone, a ghost of a shadow of a remnant of it in his expression.

"I, um," he starts. "Mike? If I said something... I mean, if I were..."

Mike is listening. Raptly.

"I *really*... I'm-- You-- "

And god, for someone who often roleplays for hours at a time, Will's not doing so good with his words today. He knows passages of Shakespeare off by heart, and he can write a pretty decent essay on colonists of Early America, and he's got those notecards with him all the time so that he can commit important things to memory. And *none of that is helping whatsoever*.

So Will sighs, willing his breath to unpick the little threads of anxiety running through him as it goes. When he steps into Mike's personal space and tilts his head up, silently asking permission, it's the most spontaneous thing he's ever done.

Mike's totally taken aback. It's exactly what Will had been afraid of, but he doesn't feel it so cripplingly now. After letting him know over Othello and having him believe every word of every story and

waking up on a brand new day with him at his side, Will's feeling fairly strong when it comes to rejection. (Even if he is a bit wobbly at present.) Mike's wide eyes barely rattle his sudden confidence. His wide eyes and his slightly-open mouth and his freckles in awe-inspiring Japanese Hi-Definition, like those expensive TVs displayed in city electronic stores.

Mike leans back down to meet him.

But it's Will who closes the gap.

Their lips touch - oh, *gosh*. In a huge rush, it's everything he ever wanted. A shaky wave of nervousness brushes past his collarbone, all the way down his front, trickling over his ribs - and then Mike's hands are smoothing over his shoulders. His mouth is warm, and Will reaches unsteady fingers up, pressing them against the curve of Mike's jawbone.

Oh, *gosh*. Oh *wow*. This is every song by The Clash. This is every late-70s British punk rock song, blended into a single feeling. He's got Eddie and The Hot Rods bursting through his veins: *I'm sure I must be someone, now I'm gonna find out who--*

Mike makes an 'mmm' noise into his mouth, just as Will inhales lightly through his nose, and both shiver.

After a moment that feels like five seconds - but might have been weeks - they break apart. For the first time in his life, Will takes in that light sound made when lips that are your own, and lips that are decidedly *not* your own, end up separating. And he likes it. A *lot*. He's sure he's visibly *radiating* heat. Mike's turned him into a whole sun.

"Missed you," Mike whispers.

"I didn't go anywhere," Will whispers back.

"Feels like you did. Sorry I couldn't help. Sorry I can't help *now*."

The statement is so absurd that Will can't help but laugh, and he stands on the tip of his toes to press their lips together again more firmly. Of course Mike had helped. Mike had helped more than he knew. And being stuck in Saturday with his closest friend in the

whole world would probably be a heck of a lot more productive than being stuck there alone.

There's a sudden whirring noise which makes both of them bump noses, turning towards the kitchen counter simultaneously. For a brief, heart-stopping moment - and not in the same, good way that he'd only a minute ago already been through - Will's afraid the Wight is back.

Fortunately, it's only the clock.

"What the hell?" says Mike, stepping forwards. A good ol' reliable *what the hell* just about sums it up - the second hand is going haywire, spinning so quickly back and forth that it's a blur. Like some kind of souped-up metronome. He taps the clock face loudly.

"The time loop," Will says, and then feels a nauseating lurch.

Mike leans into Will's side protectively as noise erupts around them, in the same reverberating tones as the knocks on Jonathan's door had been. Joyce's hair dryer sounds industrial rather than steady and shrill; there's an elongated needle scratch that lasts for about ten seconds, drifting into the kitchen ridiculously loudly from Jonathan's room. The phone starts ringing, but the tone creeps up in pitch like it's straight out of a horror movie.

"Do you think it's coming?" Mike says. He's actually starting to look frantic - it's almost comforting.

There's a bass-filled hum that increases in volume, then stops; very, very quickly, in the blink of an eye, in fact, the world begins to turn again. The first tick of the second hand (still five minutes fast, mind you) feels like Hawkins breathing out with heavy relief. The phone trills. Joyce's hair dryer starts whining. It's hard to pick out, but Jonathan's turntable broadcasts the opening stabs of Fleetwood Mac - 'Don't Stop', Will realizes, and wants to crack up hysterically.

It all falls into place, and Saturday arrives.

"I think," Will says, certain that the sentence on his tongue tastes sweet, "that it's *going*."

The hair dryer shuts off, and the two try not to look like they're watching as Joyce strides into the hall.

"Hello, Byers resi...? Oh, good morning, Hopper! No, I'm fine, how're you? I'm just getting ready for work. Uh-huh. No, he's been fine all week... Even yesterday, *yes*, what's your point?"

"*Mom?*" Will mouths, wandering over to the phone. "*Can I...?*"

"He's here now," she says, and untwirls the cord from her finger. "Yeah. Okay, see you soon, Hop."

Will takes the receiver, but Joyce cups the speaker with her hand.

"You *are* okay, aren't you--?"

"Mom, relax, I'm fine! I just wanna say hi," Will laughs, and presses the handset to his ear. Whilst Joyce returns to her room to finish her hair, Mike crowds Will against the wall and twangs the phone cord.

"*Hey, kid.*"

"Hi, Chief. Everything okay?" Will asks.

"Well," says Hopper, "*I didn't wanna worry your mom, but there's been... an incident. Don't you panic either-- it's been taken care of, I just wanted to call in and check up on you.*"

The hair dryer's on. Joyce can't hear.

"Gross hair, dead face, claw-hands?" Will asks, as quietly as he can. "Made minutes go all jumpy and weird?"

"*How in the goddamn hell--*"

"It's okay," Will grins, "I just wanna know what happened."

"*Dead as a doornail. Stunk up a storm, too.*"

"Thought it might. Sorry, Hopper."

"Kid," Hopper says, sounding like he's holding back, "*d'ya wanna let me know what went down, or not?*"

“Oh, I don’t know,” Will says quickly. “But it was a time thing, so I didn’t get a chance to tell you. Like you said... I don’t wanna worry Mom.”

There’s a crackly sigh down the phone line.

*“Let’s keep this between us, then.”*

“Yeah,” says Will happily. “Can you get rid of the scary vans, too?”

*“...I’ll cut down their presence a little. How’s that sound?”*

To Will, that sounds wonderful.

“I think I figured out what happened,” Mike says thoughtfully, running his fingers along the wallpaper. Will hangs up the receiver and fixes him with an expectant look: “well,” he says, “a wight is ‘most evil and hateful’, right? That’s what they run on. Our Time Wight would be the same, if we assume it.”

“Okay?” Will says. He’s not really sure where this is going.

Right up until Mike slides his fingers loosely into Will’s hand.

“I think we beat it with the opposite,” he says. “I think we pulled a fast one.”

“I think we drained *its* life force,” Will adds, and squeezes Mike’s hand.

“We’re gonna wanna talk about this at some point, aren’t we?”

Will *hmm*s. “Yeah, I think so,” he says, and an infectious radiant grin spreads over his face: “but you’ve got a fifty-hour campaign to plan, and I *really* think that takes priority, given Dustin’s nosiness.”

Mike has to untangle their hands to put his own on his knees, he’s wheezing so hard. He only laughs more violently and loudly when Jonathan appears and offers to make them breakfast, because god knows Will has zero control over what his face says, and apparently it had said, *dear lord in heaven, no more French toast.*

---

“Will, honey? Can I come in?”

He stands up straight, two pieces of crayon in hand. His room needs tidying. It technically hasn't been done for over two weeks.

“Sure, Mom. how was your shift?”

Joyce peers around the door, then softly creeps into Will's bedroom and perches on the edge of the bed. “It was great, thanks for asking! Although Mrs. Muller counted out ten dollars' worth of groceries in pennies again, so that was... Interesting. Hm.”

Will presses his mouth into a line and laughs. The regulars mostly sound like they're just a regular pain in the heiney.

She watches him stack the Othello pieces back into their holders: “I was thinking lasagna for dinner, what do you think?”

“Sounds great, Mom. Thanks,” Will says. He doesn't dare look at her, because this is his mother's way of stalling herself before she braces for a difficult question, and he's not sure he wants to hear anything like that today. Especially not if Hopper went back on his word. That would certainly earn him at least a month's house arrest, effectively.

“I, um... I checked in on you last night. I don't know if you remember.”

He wracks his brains: muted browns, late night hallway lights, soft voices. “Oh, yeah, I'd forgotten about that. I must've been half asleep.”

Joyce fidgets. “So was Mike, it looked like.”

Halfway through sliding the Othello board back into the box, Will stops. *Oh*. That's what this is about. He's about to panic, and uselessly tries to recall all the failed attempts at a speech he'd practiced on long-lost notecards, when he suddenly remembers that he's the



strongest out of the whole Party, and that he's got magic, and that whatever he's being frightened by in the *present* saved his skinny, sorry self less than twelve hours ago.

This is his mother. She's never *ever* been scary towards Will; only on behalf of him.

She's leaning forwards, and she tucks her hair behind her ears nervously: "is there something you wanted to talk about, Will?" she asks timidly, and he loves his mom.

He loves her so very, very much.

"...Yeah," Will says, and goes to sit on the neat little square of quilt beside her. "I think there is, Mom. It's about me and Mike, but it's mostly... *not* about Mike."

He's seen that wide-eyed expression on someone else's face before. An open, interested look. Not demanding and not expectant - curious, and patient. An expression that says, *let me help when I can*.

"Before I tell you, I want you to know..."

He takes a deep breath.

"I'm still me," he says. "I'm always going to be Will."

### **Author's Note:**

Thanks for reading - if you liked my little fic then please check out my other works, or kudos/comment/subscribe to me as an author!

I'm also on tumblr at [futureboy-ao3](#). ^u^